

AMENDMENT

Amendments to the Claims

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently amended) A surgical instrument, comprising:
a handle portion operably configured to produce an articulation motion and a firing motion;
a shaft having a longitudinal axis attached to the handle portion for transferring the articulation motion and the firing motion;
an articulation mechanism coupling the shaft to the end effector and responsive to the articulation motion to rotate the end effector from the longitudinal axis of the shaft;
an end effector distally attached to the articulation mechanism;
a firing mechanism responsive to the firing motion and coupled for movement through the articulation mechanism and end effector in response to the firing motion; ~~[[and]]~~
a pair of support plates flanking the firing mechanism across the articulation mechanism, each support plate including an end springedly engaged to a frame recess formed in the articulation mechanism; and
a spring longitudinally coupled with a selected side of the frame recess and the end of the support plate.

2.-8. (Canceled)

9. (Currently amended) A surgical instrument comprising:
a handle portion operable to produce a firing motion, a closing motion, and an articulation motion;
a shaft coupled to the handle portion operable to separately transfer the firing motion, the closing motion, and the articulation motion;

an elongate channel coupled to the shaft;
an anvil pivotally coupled to the elongate channel, responsive to the closing motion from the shaft;
a firing device including a distally presented cutting edge longitudinally received between the elongate channel and the anvil;
an articulation mechanism pivoting the elongate channel from the shaft in response to the articulation motion; ~~and~~
a pair of support plates flanking the firing mechanism across the articulation mechanism, each support plate including an end springedly engaged to a frame recess formed in the articulation mechanism; and
a spring longitudinally coupled with a selected side of the frame recess and the end of the support plate.

10. (Original) The surgical instrument of claim 9, wherein the firing device engages the anvil and elongate channel to affirmatively space the anvil from the elongate channel during longitudinal travel between the anvil and elongate channel.

11. (Original) The surgical instrument of claim 9, wherein the firing device further comprises a distally presented cutting edge, the surgical instrument further comprising a staple cartridge engaged by the elongate channel and including a proximally opened slot for receiving the cutting edge of the firing device, the staple cartridge including a plurality of staples cammed upwardly by the distal longitudinal movement of the firing device.

12-18. (Canceled)

19. (Currently amended) A surgical instrument, comprising:
a handle portion operably configured to produce a rotational articulation motion and a longitudinal firing motion;
a shaft operably configured to separately transfer the rotational articulation motion and the longitudinal firing motion;

an end effector distally coupled to the shaft means;
an articulation mechanism responsive to the rotational articulation motion to articulate the end effector;
a firing bar responsive to the longitudinal firing motion of the handle portion, the firing bar comprising:
an elongate strip longitudinally positioned for movement through the articulation mechanism, and
a firing bar head distally connected to the elongate strip and positioned for longitudinal movement in the end effector;
a support plate means for providing articulating support flanking the firing bar elongate strip through the articulation means; and
a spring longitudinally coupled with a selected side of the frame recess and the end of the support plate.

20. (Currently amended) The surgical instrument of claim ~~[[11]]~~ 1, wherein the handle portion comprises a handle means for producing a rotational articulation motion and a longitudinal firing motion, and the shaft comprises a shaft means for separately transferring the rotational articulation motion and the longitudinal firing motion.

21. (Currently amended) The surgical instrument of claim ~~[[12]]~~ 20, wherein the handle means further comprises a means for producing a longitudinal closing motion, and the shaft means further comprises a means for separately transferring the longitudinal closing motion.